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## **From Post-Work to Post-Capitalism?**

### **Discussing the Basic Income and Struggles for Alternative Forms of Social Reproduction**

**Ana Cecilia Dinerstein** Department of Social & Policy Sciences, University of Bath

**Frederick Harry Pitts** Department of Management, University of Bristol

#### **Abstract**

This article contests the suggestion that the automation of production and the provision of a basic income potentiate the transition from a post-work to a postcapitalist society. This vista -mainly represented by the work of Paul Mason and Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams misses how capitalist work is both preconditioned by a historically-specific set of antagonistic social relations of constrained social reproduction, and, determined by the specific social forms its results assume in commodity exchange and the constituted form of the nation-state. We argue that the transitional demands of automation and a basic income may serve to stem postcapitalist transformation, stopping short at a post-work society characterized by the continuation of capitalist social relations and forms. Retaining money under the rule of the nation-state, the proposed transition between post-work and postcapitalist society breaks insufficiently with the present, in some ways making it worse by replacing a wage over which workers can lawfully bargain with a state-administered monetary payment that creates a direct relationship of power between citizen and state, liquidating labor struggles. We show how the Unemployed Workers Organizations in Argentina offer a 'concrete utopian' alternative that creates the capacity to reshape the relationship between individuals, society and the rule of money, value and the capitalist state rather than reinforce it.

#### **Keywords**

Postcapitalism – Post-work society – Automation – Basic Income – Marx – Labour – Money – State

## **Introduction**

Today, the post-work society has become a hot topic of debate, taking hold in the unlikelyst of quarters including UK Labor Party policy seminars and the World Economic Forum in Davos. This has unfolded in a historical context of the crisis of the relationship between employment and broader social reproduction. In this paper, we expose and critique the nascent 'post-work' political imaginary and its claim that a postcapitalist society can be aided into existence by the implementation of transitional policies centered on automation, a universal basic income (UBI) and, somewhat less problematically, the reduction of working hours. In making this claim, we suggest, many accounts of the post-work prospectus run the risk of reifying work as something apart from the social relations of subsistence and social reproduction in which it is imbricated. This then allows the proposal of a UBI, which relies on money as a neutral unit of exchange and account rather than something that itself carries these antagonistic relations of production and consumption. Hence, rather than heralding a 'utopian' vision (van Parijs, 2013), we instead find attending the UBI an abstract 'bad utopia' that only insufficiently breaks with the present.

We focus on the most sophisticated and extended expositions of this thesis, which tend not to state in simple terms that the escape from work is synonymous with or a catalyst of the escape from capitalism. But the bold, attention grabbing titles they appear under do tend to play upon the association of the two that characterizes much of the way

they have been received in the public sphere; for instance, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Srnicek and Williams 2015). The latter authors reject what they misleadingly call ‘folk politics’ and propose, instead, that the left should demand four things: full automation, the reduction of the working week, the provision of a basic income and the diminishment of the work ethic (p.127). Whilst they forewarn that these demands that emblazon the cover of their book ‘will not break us out of capitalism’, only ‘neoliberalism’, they do suggest that their implementation could ‘establish a new equilibrium of political, economic and social forces’ that would create ‘even more potential to launch to greater goals’ (2015, p. 108). This suggests that Srnicek and Williams’s post-work position could be critiqued only insofar as the critique centers on these goals ‘and not the horizon of post-capitalism’ (Stronge 2017). As such here we focus on how these transitional demands, shared in common with other post-work thinkers, relate to the end goal of a postcapitalist society, rather than imputing to them any directly postcapitalist content of their own.

Postcapitalism, in the work of Paul Mason (2015a) for instance, hinges on a transitional period running out of the present and into the future. But this, we argue, will not come through the suite of options presently on offer which purport to escape work alone- principally, automation and the UBI- and not the social relations and social forms that characterize capitalist society, among them value, commodities and money. From the theoretical perspective advanced here, *work* as such is not the central social relationship that defines capitalism, and any attempt to define a postcapitalist society based on a set of transitional political prescriptions that address only work and stop short of addressing all the other relationships of capitalist society will obstruct rather than

facilitate the development of an alternative to the latter. We focus instead on how work itself is undergirded at one end in a set of antagonistic social relations of separation from and dispossession of the means of production and the reproduction of labor-power, and, at the other end, in the form its results assume as value-bearing commodities exchanged in the market by means of money.

Theoretically, we combine in this paper two radically revisionist schools of contemporary Marxism. First is the social reproduction approach. Social reproduction is ‘a broad term for the domain where lives are sustained and reproduced’ (Zechner and Hansen, 2015). This suggests that capitalism is characterized as much by what supports a society of work as work itself, and that the work relationship is not the only relationship that needs to be undone for capitalism to be abolished. It is labor power and its reproduction by a range of actors and activities that counts, rather than labor and its performance by workers alone. A social reproduction approach is also advocated by Marxist feminists. Tithi Bhattacharya (2018) contends that the *separation* between production and social reproduction has been historically created. Bhattacharya begins from Marx’s understanding of the valorization of capital as comprising ‘moment[s] of a totality’ such that ‘each social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction’ (Marx, 1976, p. 711). This approach allows us to move on from a productivist Marxism without abandoning Marx, thereby making a multiplicity of forms of oppression apparent beyond the traditional class relation. Thus, production and social reproduction do not take place in the economic and the social spheres respectively, but are both fields of labor conflict and struggle (Bhattacharya, 2018). The crisis of social

reproduction is simultaneously a crisis of the separation of production and social reproduction.

We complement this social reproduction understanding of the social relations that characterize capitalist society with Marxian value-form theory in order to comprehend the 'social forms' that render capitalism an historically specific social formation (Pitts 2017). This suggests capitalism's specificity pertains not to work alone but to the forms taken by its results: commodities, value, money. We draw on Open Marxist scholarship to explore how the state itself constitutes one of these historically specific capitalist social forms, and the implications this holds for how we understand radical policy proposals (Clarke, 1991; Bonefeld, 1993; Holloway 1995, 1996). The relationship between these forms of mediation and social reproduction differs from how Marx has traditionally been conceived:

The distinctiveness of Marx's theory lay not so much in the idea of labour as the source of value and surplus value as in the idea of money as the most abstract form of capitalist property and so as the supreme social power through which social reproduction is subordinated to the power of capital. (Clarke, 1988, pp. 13-14)

Combined, these approaches to the relationship between social reproduction, social forms and social relations suggest that the escape from 'work' need not open the path to postcapitalism, and indeed may even prevent it. Either way, the attainment of both post-work society and post-capitalist society is not nearly so easy as those who propose each would have us believe. For instance, that we must work presupposes relations of distribution that relate less to labor than life itself: it is capitalist work.

Our contention is that the relations of social reproduction do not fade away with the diminution of 'paid work' via automation and the supplement of a UBI. With the abovementioned understanding of value, not only those 'working' and 'producing' but capitalist society itself is subsumed under the money-form.

Re-evaluating what we understand by 'work' and its commodification and monetarization, we might therefore also say that the association between a post-work array of transitional demands and the attainment of a postcapitalist society is not nearly so strong as popular accounts suggest.

The theoretical perspective advanced here thus illuminates how the transitional vista of automated worklessness supported by a UBI rests on a continuation of the money wage in all but name and the presence of a strong state that becomes the wage-payer of both first and last resort, with attendant consequences on the capacity of people or workers to resist and contest the conditions or pay to which they are subject. This foreshortening of the capacity of workers to struggle in turn foreshortens the capacity of the range of transitional measures post-work thinkers cite to lead us into a postcapitalist future. By falsely cleansing the world of the contradictions of capitalist society, the dynamism of these contradictions is neutered. We will use the current uptake of the UBI among authoritarian populists as an example of where this negative potential might travel politically, with specific reference to the possible adoption of the measure by the Modi government in India. This example highlights the potential consequence inherent in the UBI of quashing class struggles in, against and beyond the state- struggles without the presence of which the incentive on the part of employers to automate production and

replace workers with robots will be much diminished. As such, the transition promises to be the premature Thermidor of the proposed end destination.

We suggest the politics of social reproduction as an alternative prospectus for radical change within and beyond capitalist society. This engages with the present struggles for *alternative forms of* social reproduction. We take one specific example of this- the Unemployed Workers Organizations established in post-crisis Argentina- as a model for how the relationship with work, subsistence and money can be reconstituted in such a way as to work through the contradictions of labor, money, state and social reproduction without wishing them away. We explore the potential uptake of similar models in the UK context.

We conclude by suggesting that the potential solution to the *impasses* of the post-work prospectus is to work within contradictions and expand them. Most notably this relates to class struggle recoded not only as struggles within workplaces, but without in the sphere of social reproduction. An understanding of social reproduction as the central terrain on which capitalism establishes itself shifts our focus to how class actors resist within it. This alternative prospectus has a major contribution to make to ongoing attempts to fashion critical and radical responses to the crisis of work and the wage. From this perspective, technology and automation cannot be reified as neutral forces the unfolding of which will deliver us a workless world supported by the intervention of the capitalist state as the new wage payer. Rather, even on the terms of the postcapitalist prospectus itself, and in the absence of convincing evidence that automation will lead to technological unemployment on the scale anticipated, class struggles would be necessary to accomplish the kind of economy-wide automation of production on which their vistas of



the future hinge (Spencer, 2018). But in that literature addressed in this article, post-work society is seen as the accomplishment of a kind of 'end of history' that closes contradictions and liquidates struggles for better alternative and non-capitalist forms of social reproduction. For the absence of this factor, their utopia is an abstract one. By centering struggle and social reproduction as we do here, the possibility awaits that *concrete* utopias can be delineated and situated within practice and policy. The postcapitalist prospectus has stimulated a renewal of bold left programs for governing the future, expressed in the recent electoral pitches of socialists in the UK and France. We end, therefore, by considering the kind of politics that could translate our alternative perspective into such a policy platform today.

### **The post-work prospectus**

Although it has appeared in different guises (Aronowitz and Cutler, 1998; Aronowitz and DiFazio, 2010), the true origins of the contemporary post-work prospectus (PWP) rest in a few formerly obscure pages from Marx's *Grundrisse* – the 'Fragment on Machines' (1973, pp. 704-6, see Trott, 2017). Later surpassed by the development of his value theory to address abstract labor rather than simply concrete labor alone, here Marx forecasts a future wherein machines come to replace direct human labor in the process of production, rendering the law of value obsolete (Pitts, 2018). Despite its insignificant theoretical and textual stature, its reception caught fire through promotion by postoperaists like Antonio Negri who associated it with changes afoot in contemporary capitalism (Hardt and Negri, 2001). What is new today is the enthusiasm with which it has been met in the formal political sphere in response to technological shifts. Today, its scenario of postcapitalist

worklessness finds itself popularized by the likes of Mason (2015b). Popping up in the pages of broadsheet newspapers, its ideas now inform public debate (Beckett, 2017, 2018). The strategic opportunities opened up by the current phase of capitalist restructuring apparently promise the revitalization of progressive left politics.

The empirical and theoretical contributions to the PWP are rich and varied, but it is possible to isolate several shared emphases and central propositions offered by Srnicek and Williams and Mason. First, the development of information technology is ‘accelerating’. Allied with crisis tendencies in the current phase of capital accumulation, this terminates in a post-capitalist future. Second, dynamics of automation and new cooperative commons potentiate a post-work society of abundance and leisure. Third, progressive left politics must surpass limited, reactive and parochial ‘folk politics’, reconfiguring itself around a populist-hegemonic post-work agenda demanding reduced working hours, full automation and a UBI (Srnicek and Williams, 2015).

Although Srnicek and Williams avoid the technological determinism sometimes associated with such thinking, devoting a chapter to the political program by which their stated aims can be achieved, a crude technological determinism underpins many accounts of automation and informationalization (Spencer 2017). With the waning of work in an age of intelligent machines, we are told, technological unemployment renders the wage insufficient to secure workers' subsistence. Their labor-power- the pure potential to labor- must be reproduced through other means. This is where the UBI steps in. It is important to note here that the UBI is not posed as a silver bullet, but works in tandem with foregoing technological trends to accomplish the outcome of a postcapitalist society of automated worklessness. It provides a state-sponsored supplement to ensure the

reproduction of labor within a capitalism on the wane, so as to open the way to a postcapitalist society beyond it. In the scenario Mason projects, the UBI necessary to sustain a working population would have to be socialized in the hands of the state (2015a, p. 286). This is because, due to the rise of free machines that enable production at zero marginal cost and render impossible attempts to impose scarcity on goods, data and services, the conditions for capitalist profit are eroded and ‘the tax base in the market sector of the economy would be too small to pay for the basic income’. As such, the payment of a UBI implies a certain kind of state and a certain kind of relationship to it, not to mention the retention of money and the social relations it expresses. In the following, we will take apart this complex of ideas and suggest that the PWP obstructs rather than opens the way to a postcapitalist society precisely because of the continuing role of the state and money as forms of capitalist social relations in proposals for a UBI, and the absence of labor struggles they imply.

### **Problematizing the UBI: Wage and the money-form**

The PWP, by focusing on transitional demands like full automation, a UBI and the reduction of the working week, appears to suggest that the *problem* with capitalism is that it makes us dependent upon ‘work’, and the solution is to have less of the latter. This takes ‘work’ as the basis of capitalism as an exploitative system. The implementation of the UBI appears progressive for it frees us from this exploitation. It makes everyone semi-autonomous from work. To this point we present two objections.

First, this is a limited understanding of capitalism that lends too much weight to work itself and not enough to what makes work necessary in its determination as wage

labor and the specific kinds of results it assumes. Value, commodities and a certain historically-specific set of antagonistic social relations based not around the human performance of labor, but the reproduction of human life as labor-*power* and its mediation through abstract social forms, are not even mentioned in these proposals.

Second, such visions are based on a misconception of the nature and determination of the 'wage'. The UBI, Mason contends, pays people 'just to exist'. But this is 'only a transitional measure for the first stage of the postcapitalist project'. The 'socialization' of the wage through 'collectively provided services', or its abolition, follow (2015a, pp. 284-6). Payment 'to exist', coupled with automation, allows networked, autonomous experimentation in place of labor. As such, Mason suggests that the UBI would be a transitional step towards the abolition of the wage. But even this may retain the separation of people from independent, non-commodified means of living. The social conditions undergirding the wage would continue, with or without the wage itself. The social conditions for the sale of labor-*power* would remain, with or without a buyer. This is because the wage is not a reward for expended labor but a payment to keep workers in the condition that they can and must labor (Critisticuffs, 2015). The wage subordinates human life to 'money as command' (Cleaver 1996). We acquire what we need only as commodities bearing a price. Money is value-in-motion. Marx's critique of political economy destroys Adam Smith's belief that money 'is simply an instrument of accounting and exchange that has no substantive economic significance' (Smith cited by Clarke, 1988, p. 32). Marx revealed that in capitalist societies money is not simply the means of exchange or an innocent mediation but the concrete expression of value, the substance of which is abstract labour (Dinerstein, 2015, p. 21). As the most abstract form of capitalist

property (Clarke, 1992), money is both the means of exchange among 'equal' citizens, and the proof of the expropriation of labour. Despite its insubstantiality, money dominates and expands across the whole social and existential condition (Lilley and Papadopoulos, 2014).

Srnicek and Williams, meanwhile, argue that the UBI would overcome the wage relation and the stigmatization that accompanies welfare in countries like the UK by abolishing means testing in favor of universal, undifferentiated support (2015, p. 120). In this, Srnicek and Williams correctly identify some of the same issues around the separation from the independent individual and collective means to reproduce the means of living that are at the center of our critique. They recognize the antagonistic constitution of class society in a certain set of relations centering on social reproduction, and propose to 'loosen the practical grip of the wage relation' as a way to foreshorten it (Stronge, 2017). However, it is an individual response to collective problems (Coyle and Macfarlane, 2018). The UBI only retains and further individualizes the same individual reproduction of labor-power in a different appearance of the wage relation that stops short of its abolition by means of the abolition of the money form *tout court*.

It may seem counterintuitive to contend that the UBI marks a continuation of the wage relation. But the idea that the UBI facilitates an escape from the wage mistakes the wage as a *payment for the reproduction of the potential to labor* for a *payment for labor performed*. The wage- whether in the form of earnings or benefits, accrued as an individual or as a household- guarantees that our labor power is reproduced and, in a world where humans exist as labor power, the reproduction of life itself. Without the abolition of money, which, as mentioned at the outset, is 'the most abstract form of

capitalist property' and 'the supreme social power through which social reproduction is subordinated to the power of capital', the UBI merely secures the reproduction of humans on this same basis (Clarke, 1988, pp. 13-14). Whether we work or not is irrelevant in this case, because our potential to do so in a world where the means of production are beyond our control would be carried over regardless- possibly pending the reintroduction of labor at some future point necessitated by war or crisis sparked by the retention of a state and economy left largely intact by the absence in the PWP of any intent to significantly restructure the ownership of property on which capitalist society rests. Nowhere is the question of material ownership posed, only transformation of intellectual property laws deemed unfit to capture the capitalist state of play in a data-driven networked society (Mason 2015a).

With the UBI, the state directly superintends the rule of money. So, while UBI may apparently free us from (un)employment and the wage relation, it makes us more dependent on the command of money and the state. Money and the state are not neutral entities to be appropriated at will but economic and political forms of capitalist social relations. In other words, they are 'forms assumed by the basic relation of class conflict in capitalist society, the capitalist relation, forms whose separate existence springs, both logically and historically, from the nature of that relation' (Holloway and Picciotto, 1991, pp. 121-2). If we steer away from work and focus on the totality formed by production and social reproduction, we can see that the obstinacy of both the presence of the state and the distribution of money mean that no 'postcapitalism' need attend UBI's post-work idyll, as is proposed in the programmatic statement of transitional demands that characterize the abovementioned proposals. Indeed, by bolstering their power, the

transitional route to postcapitalism through a post-work society may well foreclose the very thing it sets out to achieve.

### **Problematizing the UBI: The state and class struggles**

This brings us to the problematic treatment of the state amongst the abovementioned advocates of the PWP. An automated economy requires a capitalist state supporting and maintaining our capacity to consume. It is not difficult to see that UBI increases the dependence of people on the state for their subsistence. The PWP does not reflect on the character of the capitalist state misconceiving it as an arena for power struggles over resources. This is a managerial view of the state that focuses on the distribution of money by the state. In our view, such distribution will mean only a different *form* through which wealth is shared for our social reproduction. The PWP misses the capitalist character of the state which, as above-mentioned, is the political form assumed by capitalist social relations at a specific phase of their development. The suite of policy options the PWP proposes purports to free people from the burden of work sponsored by a better distribution of financial resources as a means by which 'post'-capitalism society can be accessed. But it continues humanity's subordination to the social forms of capitalist domination, namely money and the state.

Mason (2015a) claims that the political horizon of postcapitalism implies the development of a 'wiki-state' that will 'nurture new economic forms' such as digital co-ops, peer-to-peer transactions and so on. The state here, in common with Srnicek and

Williams and others, is portrayed as a neutral instrument that can be seized in the name of new hegemonies and popular subjects. The perspective advanced in this paper, however, argues that the state is a *capitalist state* rather than a *state in a capitalist society*. As Clarke highlights, this means that

the apparent neutrality [of the state] is not an essential feature of the state, it is rather a feature of the fetishized form in which the rule of capital is effected through the state. It is therefore something that should emerge at the end of the analysis and not something that should be inscribed in the analysis from the beginning. (Clarke, 1991, p. 185)

In describing the state's lack of neutrality, Clarke epitomizes an Open Marxist critique of the state as something possessing relative autonomy but ultimately capitalist. In other words, the state is the political *form* of the social relation of capital (Hirsch in Bonefeld and Holloway 1991). For Holloway and Picciotto (1977), fetishized forms that conceal the reality of antagonistic 'relations of class domination' constitute 'an essential part of the reproduction of that domination'. The state itself- and the autonomy that accrues to it- is therefore itself a fetishization that converts the classed inequality of capitalist society into the political form of 'equality before the state' (1977, p. 80). In so doing, the capitalist state- which for Bonefeld (2010, p. 22), is always 'fundamentally a liberal state'- acts not to resolve the contradictions of class society but to manage them. As Clarke argues, the liberal capitalist state

can contain the political impact of those contradictions to the extent that is able to secure the integration of the accumulation of domestic productive capital into the



accumulation of capital on a world scale, and so provide a basis on which to secure the political integration of the working class (Clarke 1992b: 136).

It is this integration under the auspices of formal equality that makes possible the mediation of the class antagonism in guises more favourable to workers themselves, even while the state simultaneously 'conceals the reality' of those relations (Holloway and Piccioto 1977). This contradictory but ultimately characteristic state of affairs suggest that there is no easy way out of capitalism without at once being in, against and beyond the state. But the programmatic policy platform of the PWP achieves only the first of these, and risks expanding the power of the state in such a way as to narrow the space of excess within which struggles in line with the second and third can proceed.

The unintended consequences inherent in any putative transition from post-work society to post-capitalist society that does not consider the capitalist nature of the nation-state become particularly evident if we consider the state politics of current proposals for the UBI. Consensus is forming around UBI from all sides of the political spectrum. Its implementation seems increasingly necessary to combat a generalized 'crisis of social reproduction' sparked by endemic unemployment and the retreat of the welfare state (Caffentzis, 2003; Leonard and Fraser, 2016). But the continuity it guarantees against the underlying constraints on living and working today appeals as much to those who wish to see the system preserved as does it to those seeking to do away with it. It is increasingly recognized even by the free-market right that a UBI may be necessary to contain the contradictions of a society where work is performed by robots and workers are surplus to requirements. From the *Financial Times* to the foothills of Davos it recommends itself as a safety cord for capitalism (Wolf, 2014). Emboldened by the double-edged feasibility

granted by mainstream liberal opinion, UBI is now the big demand of a contemporary left inspired by postcapitalist vistas moving in an increasingly populist and statist direction. In the UK, such vistas have been mainlined into the everyday intellectual life of the Labor Party by a blank-cavass leftwards turn under new leader Jeremy Corbyn (see Pitts and Dinerstein, 2017). UK Labor Party Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell recently announced a UBI working group, headed up by leading advocate Guy Standing (Cowburn, 2017). But where else might its purchase travel politically? As the proposal is mobilized around politically, what kind of state (or nation state) does the UBI imply?

Against leftist aims, one possible destination of the UBI is in the policy agendas of contemporary authoritarian national-populists. It has already been adopted by the Five Star Movement in Italy 'as a substitute for all existing social safety provisions linked to work and unemployment' whereby '[b]eneficiaries must declare immediate availability for work, attend training courses, participate in job interviews, and perform activities that are useful to the community in their municipality of residence' (Caruso, 2017). In the most interesting turn yet, it was announced recently that the government of Narendra Modi in India is considering its implementation (Economist, 2017a).

The Indian UBI proposals follow hot on the heels of the so-called 'note ban', or 'demonetization' whereby, on November 8<sup>th</sup>, the day of Donald Trump's election, the Indian government imposed a sudden and enforced devaluation of all paper money (Maiorano, 2016). The auspicious aim of the measure was to root out corruption in the cash-driven informal sector (Kumar, 2016). Some see the UBI as a means by which the accumulated scrap cash generated by demonetization can be recirculated. A possible tool to combat poverty, the proposals for UBI in India differ in scope from those in, say,

France or the UK. But there are still implications for how we understand the UBI in an age of authoritarianism ascendant.

Following a pilot run in India by Guy Standing, the idea was floated in the annual economic survey accompanying the government's budget declaration (Davalala *et al*, 2015). Although small- no more than the average month's wage over the whole year- it would make a substantial impact, reducing absolute poverty some 20 per cent. It would be partly funded by a bonfire of existing welfare payments. The cuts to welfare would specifically target stratified systems for subsidized water, food and agricultural resources. As the *Economist* notes (2017b), this runs the risk of 'telling an illiterate farmer that a food-in-kind scheme he has used for decades is being scrapped to finance a program that will put him on par with [...] a tycoon who lives in a 27 storey house'. Class antagonism is here elided for the abstract 'people'.

The UBI measure contains a potential overlap with Modi's undeclared state of emergency, pro-Hindu migrant policy and vows to disenfranchise Muslims (Sharma, 2016; Das, 2016). For the sums to add up, only 75 per cent of the country could receive the payment. Payment via compulsory biometric identification cards would strengthen the government's hand in deciding who does and who does not get paid. Of course, this would contradict any claim that this basic income is in any way 'universal', but our contention here is that this purported universality conceals within it the possibility of its own negation in projects of exclusivist national populism. A potential exclusionary effect thus teams with the capacity of the government to wield the wand of who gets what. And this, perhaps not coincidentally, relates to an outcome of the recent 'note ban' implemented by Modi around the same time as considerations began of the UBI

(Chakraborty, 2017). The note ban was an exclusionary measure not so much targeted at but specifically impacting upon Dalits, Muslims and other ethnic groups subject to high levels of poverty and joblessness, who tend to subsist more closely from the cash-led economy. Demonetization impacted forcefully upon poor farmers who relied on savings to subsist, by rendering those savings both useless and worthless. In this way, it replaced an individualized currency with a digital state-directed money ripe for adaptation in the UBI, in the process encouraging the spending of saved cash as a means to raise effective demand.

UBI mobilizes, on the guarantee of imminent riches, the masses as a national citizenry whilst allowing the eventual exclusion of those who fall foul of birth between other borders or beliefs. Its power consisting in the totalitarian relationship it establishes between the state and the capacity to subsist, the UBI, paid on basis of membership of a nationally-defined people, is a policy that aims to cohere such a people in a class society where one cannot in practice exist, and excludes those who cannot or will not conform. UBI therefore has the potential to be not revolutionary, as the left imagine, but deeply reactionary. With the best of intentions in a world gone bad, leftish conceptualizations of the UBI sometimes give succor to its possible implementation in the arsenal of authoritarianism, comingling with the right in a wider turn to populism, nationalism and 'sovereignism' (Henri-Levy, 2016).

According to Laclau (2002), populism is about articulating difference on lines of equivalence, on the basis of a grievance shared by many. On an irretrievably national basis at a time of the breakdown of liberal international institutions, UBI cannot but construct this equivalence and the grievances on which it feeds along national lines. This

is as much out of necessity as choice, unless the UBI is organized worldwide, or Europe-wide, for instance- unlikely within a fragmenting global order. Yet the idea cannot be extricated from its context in concrete national conditions. In a time of national retrenchment, the UBI cannot but imply an exclusionary approach, its 'universality' recoded as the universality of a national people. Such arguments for a historically premature universality mask, as Bonefeld suggests

the global character of exploitative relations...The specific character of the state's integration requires an analysis of the peculiarities of a particular state and its national economy so as to understand the interrelation of the international movements of capital and the national formulation of policies. (Bonefeld, 1993, p. 61)

The UBI sums this up: contrary to its universality, an exclusionary measure which grants citizens a guaranteed income but not necessarily those who are not subjects of a given state. In this way, the UBI resonates with a politics reconstituting itself around open and closed as much as left and right, as the latter undergo a populist convergence. Rolled out worldwide, this protectionism could well aid and abet the development of the UBI. The prospect of the widespread return of capital controls would help furnish the resources to enact national UBIs (Warner, 2016). Where control do not take hold, such as in the EU, so-called 'helicopter money' could provide the hard cash with which to do it (McFarlane, 2016). This resonance with the political economy of the present makes more pressing scrutiny of another impasse of the PWP: the potential liquidation of labor struggles.

### **Liquidating labor struggles?**

Some advocates contend that the UBI, by affording time and freedom to workers to choose how they use their time, would create more opportunities for class and labor struggles to ensue (Stronge, 2017). But the critical conceptualization of capitalist society we offer in this paper sees the state as a central mediating force between labor and capital- not as a neutral instrument of power but as an inherent part of capitalist society. The question we must ask then is not so much what the UBI would do in terms of labor and capital alone, but manner in which it mediates, and potentially replaces, by means of the state, this relationship. Insofar as this is the case the polyvalence of the UBI makes it very much up-for-grabs politically, winding up one part of a wider politics that the left must do its best to resist.

The left advocates UBI out of the best intentions, but remains within a mode of thinking that, by not understanding capitalism, does not understand how it is confronted. Most painfully, it has the potential to fulfil the program of right populisms and totalitarianisms through time by liquidating class conflict in production. In this way the UBI potentiates the self-destruction of the left and of the labor movement (Cruddas and Kibasi, 2016). Take, for instance, the link between demonetization and UBI in the Indian case. The combined effect of demonetization and UBI would, on the one hand, replace an individualized money supply through which people access the things they need by means of the wage with one granted at state convenience. On the other, for those not currently in receipt of a wage, it creates a permanent dependence on the umbilical cord of the state irrespective of its character. Although there are specificities to the situation in India that change some of these calculations, applied more widely the UBI breaks here with some vital preconditions of class struggle, limiting the bases for mobilization.

Under the real illusion of legal equivalence circumscribed by the impersonal power of the state, buyer and seller of labor power meet in the market as equal parties. The class struggle then moves through, and is contained within, the practices and processes assumed by these legal real appearances. Class struggle is a struggle *over the form of* these legal as well as economic and political forms that mediate class struggle, which are, in turn, modified, or even destroyed, as in the case of Modi in India or Trump in the USA. Wage bargaining sees struggles ensue for a higher price of labor power, engaged in by associations of its sellers. This is driven by the collective struggle to live and enjoy life. Once the provision of money comes not from the wage but from the beneficence of the state, this web of relations by which workers win a better balance between their subsistence and the work they do collapses. From the impersonal power of liberal legal structures, we have the personalized power of state fiat determining who gets what. The weighty democratic, administrative and brute-force heft that this arrangement implies will no longer be concealed behind contractual niceties, but waged openly and directly. Class conflict destroyed, only state power remains.

This is an extreme example that usefully serves to highlight how, liquidating class struggles for a nationally-constituted citizenry, bad utopias reliant on the UBI imply class struggle as a closed case whilst largely retaining the current rule of property ownership, including, crucially, that of the means of production, for which no postcapitalist or post-work vista gives a convincing vision for redress. Crucially the UBI *retains* the current rule of property, of power, whereas, 'if Karl Marx were alive, he'd be shouting about the ownership of the means of production' (Jon Cruddas, quoted in Sodha, 2017).

The UBI, as a key principle of the proposed post-work society, thus breaks in a number of respects with some vital preconditions of worker organization. In his analysis of the Keynesian state, Holloway argues that the latter constituted a specific 'mode of domination' for the Keynesian state contained the power of labor via the 'monetization' of class conflict. Thus, '[i]n the face of rigidity and revolt, money was the great lubricant. Wage-bargaining became the focus of both managerial change and worker discontent.' The crisis of Keynesianism was, in this sense, 'a crisis of a form of containment of labor' (Holloway, 1996, pp. 8, 23, 27). The UBI could become, then, another form of domination of the power of labor, only that this time, rather than relying on class conflict, aims at obliterating it.

In this way, it harkens back to those forms of populism and authoritarianism that, where they have reared their ugly heads, have sought to destroy the working-class movement where capitalism could not by promising the resolution of class struggle on a higher plane of primordial identity prior to the political working through and out of contradictions. Only here, for the contemporary postcapitalist advocates of the UBI, the abstraction that quashes class struggle is only implicitly the national people, and explicitly free money and free time under the watchful eye of a benevolent state. The national aspect is implicit because, in a world where borders are strengthening and not weakening, and strongmen rule supreme, what other basis will there be for a UBI than the nation and its 'people'? The UBI may yet conceal capitalist society's contradictions in the dark cellar of autarky. This way, withdrawing from the world and excluding the outsider, utopia may be the last thing UBI leads to. It is our contention that these tendencies are always there within conceptualizations of the UBI, right and left.



The UBI effectively abolishes any means by which workers can struggle for a better deal, obliterating class struggle and purporting to resolve its contradictions at the imaginary level of a nation state paying free money to a nationally-defined people. In so doing, the vista of an abolition of work afforded by the UBI serves up the fruits of struggle prematurely, without struggles having taken place. It temporarily defers the contradictions of class antagonism without resolution through the antagonism itself. This is ironic even on the terms of the postcapitalist argument itself, insofar as class struggle would be necessary to drive up wages to the extent that employers would be motivated to worth low-paid workers in bad jobs with machines in the first place. Yet none of the popular imaginaries of an automated future entertain this notion, outsourcing capitalist development to technology as a neutral force as opposed to one imbricated and resulting from wider social relations.

By endowing the relationship between work and technology with a set of eschatological and Promethean associations, the post-work hypothesis steals work from its antagonistic context in capitalist social relations that both pre-exist and continue to underpin the compulsion to labor in the first place, through money. This is nowhere more transparent in the appeal to a benevolent state as the effective payer of the wage *qua* UBI. This purports to change the social relations under which we get paid for the better, but runs the risk of doing so for the worst precisely because the class struggle contained and concealed in the formal legal relationship between the buyer and seller of labor is elided. Addressing demands to a state now invested directly in the reproduction of the capacity to labor- in however 'liberated' a way- is much harder than fighting for their recognition in the workplace. Whilst the workplace comes with its own everyday forms of

domination, individual employers have no monopoly on the means of violence such as the state wields. In this world, placing the power of deciding who will be paid and for what in the hands of a state, however benevolent, jumps the gun, pre-empting the overhaul of the wider social relations and social forms of capitalist society.

### **Social reproduction struggles as ‘labor’ struggles**

We propose an alternative to the conceptualization of the PWP as a transitional phase on the path to postcapitalism: the politics of social reproduction, and specifically the delineation of ‘concrete utopias’ (Dinerstein, 2016). As noted, scholars have suggested that capitalism is undergoing a severe and protracted crisis of social reproduction. Employment increasingly fails to support subsistence. This is in our view a crisis of the capitalist *form* of social reproduction. While PWP advocates confuse this situation with an unfolding end of work, we use the social reproduction standpoint to reframe this and engage with the search for alternative forms of social reproduction that is already actively taking place at the grassroots, but which the more ‘accelerationist’ strands of postcapitalist thinking dismiss as ‘folk politics’ (Srnicek and Williams 2015).

The PWP, by seeing in the crisis of social reproduction the end of work, misses the connection between production and what precedes it, logically and historically. As Nancy Fraser writes, while Marx ‘looked behind the sphere of exchange, into the ‘hidden abode’ of production, in order to discover capitalism’s secrets’, it is also necessary to ‘seek production’s conditions of possibility behind that sphere’ (Fraser, 2014, p. 57). Namely: why do we have to work, and what keeps us working? The PWP wants to do away with work, without posing the question why it exists in the form it does. In asking

this, the social reproduction perspective on the crisis of work that we advocate here takes inspiration from Marxist-feminist inquiries into the 'conditions of possibility of labor-power' and the 'manner in which labor power is biologically, socially and generationally reproduced' (Ferguson and McNally, 2015). Marx writes that 'the worker belongs to capital before he has sold himself to the capitalist' (1976, p. 723). This relationship begins 'not with the offer of work, but with the imperative to earn a living' (Denning, 2010, p. 80). This relates to an ongoing process of primitive accumulation whereby workers are dispossessed *continually* of the common means of meeting their needs and new enclosures spring up daily (Dalla Costa, 1995). This is reproduced constantly to keep workers in a situation whereby they must sell their labor-power to live. More importantly, as Dalla Costa contends, 'human reproduction is built on an *unsustainable sacrifice* by women, as part of a conception and structure of life which is nothing but labor time within an *intolerable sexual hierarchy*' (1995, p. 13). The social reproduction perspective sees these conditions as key to capitalist society. Workplace exploitation, then, is not the singular moment of domination (Bhattacharya 2015). The violent denial of the human need to subsist here precedes the compulsion to labor. There is no escaping work without addressing how to meet the former. The PWP offers no alternative infrastructure to do so independent of commodification. The UBI, a possible solution, only reinforces the rule of money with which the wage is intimately connected, simply substituting the buyer of labor power with the state.

What the social reproduction approach suggests, by foregrounding the constitutive social relations that undergird work to begin with, is that struggles for social reproduction are *instances of class struggle*. Struggles addressed to state solutions and state

recognition are themselves struggles for the means to live and subsist. As Anna Curcio points out in an interview with Kathi Weeks (Weeks and Curcio 2015), the same struggles ‘brought together by the same possibility of survival’, are also struggles for the ‘survival and the autonomous reproduction of the human being and a struggle for the survival and the reproduction of capital’ (Weeks and Curcio 2015). In fights to protect the welfare system, for instance, this dual identity is clear. Our survival hinges on the survival- and the prosperity- of capital, for now at least. This creates tensions, struggles, conflicts. They center on consumption, the commons, commodification: outside production, in the sphere of realization. The survival of society hinges on the ability of people to subsist and reproduce the means of both living and laboring.

Covering everything that reproduces both life and capitalist society, these struggles highlight how social reproduction is inevitably crisscrossed by contradictions, wherein lies room for resistance and rupture, and for the creation of *alternative forms of* social reproduction, or concrete utopias (Dinerstein, 2016). Contradictorily, the reproduction of each- life and capital- is the reproduction of the other. Capitalist society depends upon the commodification of the labor-power we sell in order to live. Social reproduction is a sphere of conflict *as long as* labor power implies this twin intent. The capitalist desires its reproduction to exploit, the worker its reproduction to eat. Wage demands, strikes for pay or better hours, exercise regimes, diets. In seeking a better standard of life, all express this antagonistic settlement's contradictory contours.

Any analysis of work and economic life must tune in to these contradictions and their possibilities. When we reproduce labor-power, we also reproduce life itself. The wage pays for labor-power, and it is through the wage that we live. There is no other

way. As such, the 'contradiction between the needs of the workers and the needs of capital that lives at the core of the problem of social reproduction cannot be more vivid. This is not a political, economic or social issue but it is about the reproduction of human 'life' (Dinerstein, 2002, p. 14). In fighting for the welfare system, we both ensure our reproduction as humans well as workers, and in turn the reproduction of capitalist society. The two sides, in their contradictory unity, are the same. Our survival hinges on the survival of capital, for now, from which we seek strength to fight on for an alternative to it. The social reproduction standpoint suggests that capital and state sustain us. But it endows the situation with a thoroughly contradictory status. There is a total absence of any Durkheimian functionalism. The post-work thesis, on the other hand, posits precisely such a functional vision of society. Namely, it eliminates conflict and contradiction and seeks to 'solve the problem of work'. At its reactionary extension, UBI seeks the cleansing of contradictions in state projects of national-popular renewal.

To intervene in the politics of work, whilst keeping these contradictions open, one must first intervene in the politics of the social relations that support it. Struggles over social reproduction are 'labor' struggles. Concurrently, 'labor' struggles are mainly struggles over social reproduction. *We struggle to live, not to work.* Work mediates life. Or better, the wage does. The struggle for money takes place in, against and beyond capital. The social reproduction approach has touched on an important element of present class struggles: But this struggle is not only one for 'crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist' (Benjamin, 1999). In struggling to avail ourselves of what we need to eat, to drink, to share together, we gesture from this world to others. That is, we produce surplus of possibilities that, as we have shown, post-

work advocates are presently missing, and social reproduction scholars have only timidly addressed. Within the contradictions set out in this section, it is therefore a political choice to identify which kind of society we want to emerge from this crisis of the capitalist form of social reproduction. And, at present, all the visions for how this pans out liquidate falsely resolve these contradictions in the UBI, depriving them of their transformative dynamism. In the next section, we suggest an alternative that liquidates neither social reproduction as class struggle, nor class struggle as social reproduction. This centers on a 'concrete utopia' that keeps open the capacity of the subjects involved to struggle and contest the institutionalized forms their social relations assume.

### **From abstract to concrete utopia: Illustrating an alternative**

Today we witness a generalized embrace of abstract utopias like the automated worklessness of advanced robotics and the UBI. But the space to create *concrete utopias* is required (Dinerstein, 2016). Eric Olin Wright (2010) offers a similar term, *real utopia*, to describe how social movements envision new worlds and can transform capitalism. He suggests that the expression 'real utopia' 'is meant to be a provocation, for "utopia" and "real" do not comfortably go together'. Wright's 'real' utopias are not only desirable but, according to the author, they are necessarily viable and achievable. Wright (2013, pp. 3, 8) claims that 'if you worry about desirability and ignore viability or achievability, then you are just a plain utopian. Exploration of real utopias requires understanding of these other two dimensions'.

The notion of 'concrete utopia' is radically different and, we think, more appropriate to capture present struggle around social reproduction. Concrete utopia is not concerned

with 'feasibility' but with opening the *possibility* to enact a collective dream. Real utopia requires 'objective' conditions for its realization. The notion of 'concrete utopia' refers the concrete *anticipation* of what Ernst Bloch names the not-yet-conscious and, more generally, the *not-yet* (Bloch 1959/1986; see also Bloch and Lowy, 1976; Lowy, 2015). The *not yet* is not probable according to objective indicators but possible, and, as Stengers suggests, '*possibility* cannot be calculated *a priori* because it implies the fact that the very description of the system itself can change. And you cannot calculate that' (Stengers and Zournazi, 2002, p. 246).

A necessary first step to the delineation of such concrete utopias in the present is to address class, property and social reproduction whilst still allowing struggle to thrive, harnessing the legal and political weaponry at hand to expand space for alternatives through and not in spite of the present state of things. It is imperative to locate where this potential lies. As an example we will look at one of the sectors of the Argentinian Unemployed Workers Organizations (UWOs) as an illustration of how each of the impasses outlined above can be overcome and concrete utopias envisioned (Dinerstein, 2010, 2017; see also Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2007).

This example is important for two reasons: the first one is that their concern with the productive sphere is overcome with reference to new forms of social reproduction (Mason-Deese, 2016). The direct dependence on the benevolence of the state is mediated through new collective institutions, and the concept of continuing class struggle and societal contradiction is kept intact. The second is that the collective actions of the UWOs are in no way 'folk politics', that is, according to Srnicek and Williams (p. 13), a tendency and political action designed to interpret the world and to react against the

'historical experiences of communism'. This Eurocentric and colonial classification of grassroots struggles around social reproduction falls short in understanding that the struggle for life is now central for social movements. It also ignores that the possibility of creating an excess beyond the present lays within these organizing processes. These possibilities for an excess, as we shall see, are not exhausted as in the abstract utopia of state control, but becomes a structuring principle of concrete utopias that remedy many of the flaws of the PWP. While they are always at risk of being integrated into the modus operandi and dynamics imposed by the powers that they confront, and therefore suffer de-radicalization, the 'translation' of these concrete utopias into state policy is a process of struggle that allows room for, rather than forecloses, radical changes (Dinerstein, 2015; 2017)

Originating in the late 1990s, the Argentinean Unemployed Workers Organisations are well-known in Latin America and elsewhere for their struggle for autonomy and dignity against social exclusion and unemployment originating in the 1990s and 2000s. Unemployment in Argentina had risen from 6% in 1991 to 18% in 1995. Organizationally spontaneous roadblock protests called for 'job creation, public workers, essential services [and] participation in the management of employment programmes' (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 358). The 'Piqueteros' had a strategy of 'leveraging state resources through a combination of protest and social projects in the community and not only challenged the common view of the unemployed as excluded and redundant but also influenced the institutional framework within which social demands could be made'. They did so through the creation of new UWOs which, through resistance and struggle, were successful in drawing down state benefits that would have been paid individually and paid them



collectively for community projects that were decided collectively to address the needs of social reproduction.

One in particular is worthy of specific scrutiny: the *Union Trabajadores Desocupados* (UTD), or Unemployed Workers Union, a group of autonomous *Piqueteros*. The UTD was formed following the privatization of the local state oil company- only 5600 of 51000 workers remained. In the municipality of General Mosconi, 34.6% of the population was unemployed by 2001. The UTD was led by ex-oil workers, who assessed projects for support according to 'local need', 'dignity' and 'genuine work' in 'solidarity'. Projects addressed 'long-term sustainability' in 'housing, education and environmental protection', and also everyday issues like 'recycling, refurbishing public buildings and houses, community farms, soup kitchen...retirement homes, health care visits to the ill and disabled, production of regional crafts, carpentry...maintaining and repairing hospital emergency rooms and schools.' In this way, the UTD became the 'quasi-city council' of General Mosconi (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 361).

They did this through state funding, but not in a direct way reliant on the benevolence of the state. Rather resources were captured in an active and open relationship of conflict and negotiation that created space for things to exceed the capacity of the state to control and govern how the money was spent. The UWOs fought for 'the re-appropriation of social programmes for collective purposes', and they did this by switching between two modes of activity: mobilization, which used the roadblocks to demand resources; and policy, which moved state resources through the neighborhood to implement the resources in social projects. It is only by means of and through the seeming contradiction between these two registers of mobilization and social policy that

state resources can be leveraged at all. The UWOs worked within contradiction rather than seeking to escape in a final, closed settlement that established an abstract utopia. Their concrete utopia, insofar as it was achieved at all, was subject to and thrived from these contradictions, 'using resistance as a conduit for community development and community development as a conduit for resistance' (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 361). Any PWP based on the UBI, by seeking the absolution from work by means of the state, forecloses contradiction in an abstract utopia of automated worklessness with no room for further struggle within the interstices of those contradictions.

Rather than a welfare policy granted from up on high to which individual recipients must address themselves, the UWOs instituted 'welfare policy from below' (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 361). Benefits of £30 per head per month were paid every 6 months from the state, and then distributed by the UTD among the 'unemployed workers' who were 'willing to undertake community work'. By 2005 the UTD managed as many programs as the municipality and more than the provincial governments- housing co-ops, garment factory, training centers, a university. It also served as a job agency and trade union, using its leverage to get unemployed workers jobs, backed up by 'access blockades' outside and, once enough UTDs employed, 'line stoppages' within (Dinerstein, 2010, pp. 360-1).

As such welfare was locked into a convincing reconstitution of a community of work and workers. UTD, for example, identified 'work as a true human attribute that must be used for the production of useful goods and services' (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 361). The key issue here was 'dignity'. Their search for dignified work permitted neither Prometheanism nor neurosis around what is conceptualized correctly as an everyday point of meaning and antagonism. By working within the contradictions that confront the everyday practice

of work and the abstract determination of labor in capitalist society, the UWOs 'challenged the individualistic logic of workfare and state policy and reconceptualized 'work' in capitalist society' (Dinerstein, 2017). They did so in far more concrete and practical a way than the PWP seems capable of, whilst also embedding this in an attempt to overhaul the socially reproductive social relations of subsistence that compel us to work in the first place. For Zechner and Hansen (2015), 'struggles around social reproduction allow for a renegotiation of the around what is considered work, or what is valued as such'. We can see in the *Piqueteros*' struggle over social reproduction a similar renegotiation, situating the separation from the means of subsistence and the compulsion to sell one's labor power in historical context. Theoretically, this destabilizes it. Practically, it allows the concrete search for contemporary on-the-ground alternatives.

The UWOs are suggestive of the possibilities of 'translating' radical political and social practice into institutionalized solutions struck with the state. Translation is defined as 'the processes, mechanisms and dynamics through which the state incorporates the cooperation and solidarity ethos of the SSE practiced by social movements through policy' (Dinerstein, 2017). However, with this the risk is run of the 'depoliticization' of these movements by the new legal structures put in place to superintend the state programs on which their claims are made. UWOs had to become NGOs, registered and assessed by the state, or else, as did the UTD, retain autonomy by using the registration of a friendly NGO, so as to 'access funding [whilst] continuing to design its own strategies and implement its own community ventures' (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 360). But it was working within this antagonistic and contradictory relationship with the state that allowed their social gains to be achieved. The UBI, on the other hand, concentrates power absolutely

in the hands of the state as a benefactor rather than a boss, with the more subservient and compliant relationship this implies. The UWOs permit acceptance that the embeddedness of social actors 'in, against and beyond' the state will always be contested. It is this from which we proceed as a starting point, rather than approaching it as a limit, so that 'institutionalization' is always already 'contested' all the way up and down. Social movements, in posing alternatives, '*navigate the tension between resistance and integration*' (Dinerstein, 2010, pp. 357-8). And it is this tension that is productive:

embedding autonomy appears to be achievable by recreating social relations at community level, and by *engaging with* the institutions of society...Autonomous collective action by civil society actors remains alive through the steady, continuing and often painful struggles underpinned by the tension between affirmation of autonomy and recuperation of autonomy by the state. (Dinerstein, 2010, p. 364)

The Piqueteros wielded power by managing and using this tension, rather than avoiding it. This is because there was an excess facilitated that such totalizing solutions as the UBI and total automation, by implying the presence of a strong and all-powerful state, do not. We can identify four dimensions or 'zones' in the movement's struggle, not staggered but contained dialectically within one another. the creative zone, the conflict zone, the translation zone and the beyond zone (Dinerstein, 2017). Regardless of compromises lost in translation, in the last of these lies an untranslatable excess- 'the impossibility to completely translate movement-led SSE practice into policy'. The possibility of a postcapitalist transition consists in the protection and expansion of this space of excess, absent in the PWP.

The UWOs demonstrate a collective alternative against the individualized structure of the UBI. Indeed, '[t]he collective use of individual social/unemployment benefits for community development purposes, financed by state programs, but devised, implemented and supervised by NGOs, as in the UWO's case, might not be unimaginable in the UK environment' (Dinerstein, 2010, pp. 364-5). As an alternative using a social reproduction approach to recode the issues the PWP currently confronts in the public consciousness, this path may well be one policymakers should consider taking that moves within contradictions and struggles rather than shutting them down in the search for abstract utopias, which reaffirm the violence of abstraction and the power of money over humanity.

This model confers further advantages over the UBI. The PWP bases its vision for the future on further technological advancement at a time where the earth's resources have already been plundered to such an extent that the only realistic option is to repurpose what we already have at our disposal. This has led some advocates to propose the plundering of resources from other planets instead (Bastani, 2017). But the vision of a smaller-scale, potentially more folk-political and decentralized alternative rests on a form of concrete activity more in keeping with environmental policies and even the 'degrowth' agenda of some green movements.

To pre-empt a possible objection, it is transparent that UWOs also imply a relationship with the state as it currently exists, dependent on its support and funding even where this is devolved to the most autonomous level. But they produce an excess insofar as they facilitate space for the continued development of conflict and negotiation both 'in' and 'against' the state. The UBI, meanwhile, suppresses class struggles and

implies a state that to serve its purpose must be all-powerful and, possibly, all-knowing, and against which the recipient of the UBI stands as an individual rather than, as in the UWOs, a member of a collective that can organize and bargain for better beyond the electoral cycle. Of course, there is the potential that under the UWO system the state can act to stifle class struggles. But the antagonistic reflex to resist against such impositions is retained, whereas the UBI sublets it under the sign of a universalized national people. By producing a totalizing response to the problems of a totalizing system, even where it is posed as a transitional demand the UBI threatens an end to struggle and the finality whereby institutionalization loses the contested character that it has by default under the current configuration of capitalist social relations.

It is fair to say that the character of the state and its relationship with society is somewhat different in, say, the UK, when compared to Argentina. However, some of the same principles as found in the UWOs already appear in the Business and Employment Cooperatives that have seen some uptake in continental European countries like France and Belgium and attracted the attention of the UK government via recent policy initiatives like the Taylor Review (Conaty *et al*, 2015; Taylor, 2017). This suggests that it may be possible to harbor alternatives in concrete existing struggles sooner than the speculative programs of the post-work prospectus might consider the case.

## **Conclusion**

We began by noting that for the PWP, the implementation of the UBI and automaton would not mark the achievement of a final state of utopia, but would rather ease the compulsion to work under the present relations of production and user into being another set of relations more in line with developments in the forces of production- automation,

Artificial Intelligence, machine learning- as they push against the current configuration. UBI is a means to aid the forces inherent in the former unlock the new set of social relations with which the present moment is pregnant. As such, it is not possible to simply critique UBI or automation as themselves straightforwardly utopian demands. But it is possible to critique UBI on the basis that it is conceived as a necessary transitional step what is in effect an entirely abstract postcapitalist utopia. Our perspective here is that the inclusion of UBI in the set of shared demands specific to the post-work moment actually implies a series of obstructions to the possibility of a concrete utopia along the same lines. The critique advanced here suggests that UBI, combined with the automation afforded by the development of the forces of production, marks the continuation of the present configuration of social relations and not their abolition. Indeed, the implementation of state-directed automation and UBI may serve to block the latter.

Based on the reading of social reproduction and labor struggles given in this paper, there is one element of the post-work prospectus that stands up to greater scrutiny and resists sublimation under an abstract utopia of state-driven automated worklessness. This is the demand for a reduction in the working week, which heterodox advocates of similar platforms share (Bregman, 2017; Weeks, 2011). This demand, we feel, resonates with its rich history in workers' movements and labor politics by retaining the space within which class struggles can move and themselves create concrete utopias without over-determination by abstract utopian programs for state-populist hegemony. Indeed, the parts of the post-work prospectus on which our critique here focuses- UBI and automation- 'are not nearly as historically-aligned with workers' struggles and can potentially sound like technocratic fixes' (Stronge, 2017). We would therefore recommend

that, if the platform is to continue its persuasive push to the center of public debate, it is to such a reduction in working hours that proponents might best direct their efforts, as it works from and expands the demands and desires inherent in existent struggles, and opens out rather than squeezes the space in which yet new struggles can arise. This can proceed independently of the more problematic proposals of full automation and the payment of a UBI.

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